

**Jazz**  
Information

# DUKE ELLINGTON

And His Famous  
Orchestra

## The Brunswick Sessions (1932—35). Volume 1.



DUKE ELLINGTON

The Brunswick Sessions Vol. 1

RBD 3001

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1. MOON OVER DIXIE
2. IT DON'T MEAN A THING
3. LAZY RHAPSODY (Swanee Rhapsody)
4. BLUE TUNE
5. BABY, WHEN YOU AIN'T THERE
6. ST. LOUIS BLUES
7. CREOLE LOVE CALL
8. ROSE ROOM
9. BLUE HARLEM
10. THE SHEIK OF ARABY
11. SWAMPY RIVER
12. FAST AND FURIOUS (Lots O'Fingers)
13. BEST WISHES
14. SLIPPERY HORN
15. BLUE RAMBLE

RBD 3001



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DUKE ELLINGTON

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**MOON OVER DIXIE (a-1)***(B11200A) Vocal by Sonny Greer***IT DON'T MEAN A THING (a-2)***(B11204A) Vocal by Ivie Anderson***LAZY RHAPSODY (Swanee Rhapsody) (a-3)***(B11205A) Vocal by Cootie Williams***BLUE TUNE (b-1)***(B11223A)***BABY, WHEN YOU AIN'T THERE (b-2)***(B11224A) Vocal by Cootie Williams***ST. LOUIS BLUES (c-1)***(BX11263A) Vocal by Bing Crosby***CREOLE LOVE CALL (c-2)***(BX11264A)***ROSE ROOM (c-3)***(BX11265A)***BLUE HARLEM (d-1)***(B11839A)***THE SHEIK OF ARABY (d-2)***(B11840A)***SWAMPY RIVER (e-1)***(B11850A)***FAST AND FURIOUS (Lots O' Fingers) (e)***(B11851A)***BEST WISHES (e-2)***(B11852A)***SLIPPERY HORN (f-1)***(B11865A)***BLUE RAMBLE (f-2)***(B11866A)*

"I got my first break when I was about seventeen, down in Washington, and Louis Thomas sent for me to play piano one night. Thomas was the leader of a society band whose only competition was Meyer Davis. I was to get a chance to play in his third band on the condition I would learn to play the SIREN SONG well enough to perform it that night.

I spent the whole day learning the tune. When I arrived on the job I found that the band was a legitimate one, they wouldn't play any 'jumps'. The musicians started talking to me about correct chords, and I knew that in a few minutes I'd be sunk. Then somebody requested the SIREN SONG, and in great relief I started plunking out the number. I'd often watched Lucky Roberts who had come down from New York to play the Howard Theatre. He had a flashy style, and a trick of throwing his hands away from the piano. It occurred to me then that I might try doing what he did. Before I knew it the kids around the stand were screaming with delight and clapping for more.

In two minutes the flashy hands had earned me a reputation, and after that I was all set. I got a hunch about having my own band. . ."

#### DUKE ELLINGTON

(From "Hear Me Talkin' To Ya")

Born Edward Kennedy Ellington on April 29, 1899, in Washington DC., to a childhood that must have borne little resemblance to those of other jazz musicians - black or white. The young Duke grew up in a middle-class atmosphere of a loving, affectionate family headed by a father who was in service to both the White House and U.S. Navy, and had no lack of money. Nevertheless, music was his life from a very early age, beginning with his tinkering with the school piano's keyboard, leading him to write his first compositions - "Soda Fountain Rag" and "What You Gonna Do When The Bed Breaks Down?" - by the age of 15. Informal tuition with local musicians like Doc Perry and Henry Grant resulted in the Lucky break (if you'll pardon the pun) recalled by Duke above, and after a couple of well-placed advertisements he found himself managing three popular dance bands.

It was not until Duke's son, Mercer, was born in 1919 that he decided to concentrate on his own jazz band, but after meeting experienced jazz drummer, Sonny Greer, Duke chose the best of the available local musicians, which included Otto Hardwick, Artie Whetsol, and Elmer Snowden.

Duke Ellington's Washingtonians played their first engagement in New York City in 1922, returning the following year for residencies in Harlem and on Broadway, and by 1925 the group was sufficiently renowned for Perfect records to record it. The following year, with Don Redman on sax, a further Perfect session and two for Gennett (and a couple more with McKinney's Cotton Pickers) were recorded; there were piano solos for Paramount; and with

Bubber Miley now on trumpet, waxed for Blue-Disc. By the end of November 1926, the renamed "Kentucky Club Orchestra" with a fully formed classic Ellington line-up, began recording for Vocalion with some of the issues being credited to Duke Ellington's Orchestra, followed by sessions for Columbia/Brunswick, Victor, Okeh, Harmony, Cameo/Romeo, Perfect/Oriole/Banner, and Velvetone/Mills under a variety of names including The Memphis Bell Hops, Sunny and the Deacons, Traymore Orchestra, Earl Jackson & His Musical Champions, The Chicago Footwarmers, Brown Berries, Lonnie Johnson's Harlem Footwarmers, The Whoopee Makers, The Lumberjacks, Duke Ellington And His Cotton Club Orchestra, Jungle Band, Joe Turner And His Memphis Men, Dixie Jazz Band, Six Jolly Jesters, The Ten Blackberries, Harlem Hot Chocolates, and The Memphis Hot Shots. By the end of 1929, the Ellington Orchestra had stockpiled an impressive number of classic sides - almost 150 masters - among them, "East St. Louis Toodle-oo", "Black and Tan Fantasy", "Creole Love Call", "Black Beauty", "Jubilee Stomp", "The Mooche", "Misty Mornin'", and "Flaming Youth".

The amazingly stable personnel of the early Ellington Orchestra was also very nearly completed - only the smooth trombone sound of Lawrence Brown was missing; Tricky Sam Nanton and Wellman Braud had joined in 1926 when Irving Mills began managing the band; Harry Carney and Barney Bigard had joined in 1927; Johnny Hodges joined in 1928; and Cootie Williams and Juan Tizol arrived in 1929 at the expense of Bubber Miley and Otto Hardwick, the latter of whom would return during the spring of 1932.

Success with a musical revue, a Flo Ziegfeld show, and The Cotton Club residency, as well as record sales, led to the orchestra appearing in movie featurettes and full length movies such as "Black & Tan Fantasy" (1929) and "Check and Double Check" (1930), by which time Ellington was churning out hits with dizzying frequency. "Mood Indigo", "Ring Dem Bells", "Rockin' In Rhythm", "Old Man Blues", "Creole Rhapsody", and "It Don't Mean a Thing" were all from 1930 and 1931.

In February 1932 Duke Ellington And His Famous Orchestra commenced a long spell with Brunswick and Columbia which was punctuated quite often with sessions for Victor and once, during the band's first European tour in summer 1933, for English Decca. By 1935 the band was recording exclusively for Brunswick/Columbia and its various subsidiaries, a situation which lasted until March 1940 when it switched exclusively to RCA Victor/Bluebird for six years except for the several V-Discs it recorded. The tracks laid down for Brunswick and Columbia between February 1932 and March 1935 have not been as well served in reissue terms as the earlier myriad of labels or the later Columbia and Victor sides, apart from a superb, two-volume boxed set from 1963 entitled "The Ellington Era 1927-1940" produced by the redoubtable Frank Driggs. In his introduction to volume one's booklet, Irving Mills wrote:

"From the time I first met him, in 1926, until our relationship ended in 1939, I was as close to Duke as anyone living, outside of his own family. I saw him rise from a position of obscurity to one of world-wide recognition, and I didn't see this from the sidelines as a spectator; as Duke's manager I was proud and happy to be an integral part of the developments, and to watch his mounting success with a great sense of personal satisfaction.

"When I first met Duke he was leading a small group at the Kentucky Club, at Broadway and 49th Street. I remember the occasion well: I was with the late Sime Silverman, the founder of **Variety**, who was out for an evening's relaxation after putting the paper to bed.

"Though the initial impact of Duke as a musician and person was unforgettable, one detail escapes me: I am still not quite sure which tune it was that particularly caught my attention. I've seen it printed that it was his arrangement of "St. Louis Blues" that attracted me, though as I recall it today, I believe it was Duke's own **Black and Tan Fantasy**. In any case, the main point is that I was immediately and profoundly impressed by this young man who, it soon became obvious, was not just another pianist or bandleader, but a truly creative artist, with the latent potential for an unlimited career."

Perhaps Mills was simply one of the first to recognise the gift of jazz' first "composer" — in the classical sense — who had the facility to lead a big band of greatly independent and individual musicians for the best part of the subsequent half a century — and who was uniquely able to appeal to the vastly differing Carnegie Hall concert-goers and the Savoy Ballroom jitterbugs at one and the same time. As jazz promoter and record label owner Norman Grantz once said, "Duke Ellington was the real pioneer in jazz concerts, and he can go into the Apollo or the Savoy and play the same music he plays at a one-nighter for dancing and at his concerts. . . ." Duke, on the other hand, always gave the credit of the band's success to his talented and chronically loyal bandmen. However viewed, the present, three volume set on Jazz Information cah-3001, -3002, and -3003 consisting of the best takes from the Brunswick and Columbia sessions, selected by Sture Hällström, held between February 1932 and March 1935 inclusive, gives us all an opportunity to reassess the first recordings of the complete classic Ellington orchestra: an ensemble that was sometimes wild and free-wheeling and sometimes symphonic and urbane, but always entertaining.

#### DAVE PENNY - March 1989.

#### Sources:

"HEAR ME TALKIN' TO YA" — Nat Shapiro & Nat Hentoff (1955)

"THE WORLD OF DUKE ELLINGTON" — Stanley Dance (Da Capo)

"THE BIG BANDS" — George T. Simon (1967)

The booklets accompanying the two volume set "The Ellington Era 1927-40" Columbia C3L 27 & C3L 39 with contributions from Irving Mills and Stanley Dance.

**Cover photo:** Duke Ellington & His Orchestra arrive at Southampton, 1933: Back: Bessie Dudley, Bill Bailey (dancers); Sonny Greer, Fred Guy, Harry Carney, Otto Hardwick, Barney Bigard, Spike Hughes (British critic and musician), Cootie Williams, Wellman Braud, Johnny Hodges, Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton, Lawrence Brown, Ivie Anderson; Front: Derby Wilson, Freddy Jenkins, Jack Hylton (British bandleader and impresario), Duke Ellington, Irving Mills (agent and manager), Juan Tizol, Artie Whetsol.

#### Recommended reading:

"MUSIC IS MY MISTRESS" — Duke Ellington (1973)

"DUKE ELLINGTON IN PERSON" — Mercer Ellington with Stanley Dance (1978)

"THE REAL DUKE ELLINGTON" — Don George (1981)

**Note:** There follows a synopsis of the specific tracks used on this collection. Quotations beginning (SD) are from Stanley Dance's comments from the Columbia sets.

**MOON OVER DIXIE** — A medium tempo number that benefits from a nice brief solo from Johnny Hodges and a fine, longer solo from Cootie Williams before Sonny Greer makes one of his (thankfully) rare vocal appearances (Stanley Dance likens Greer's voice to ". . . one of the high-voiced, high-priced crooners of the day" from his performance of "Dinah" recorded for Victor, but this is at least a little more funky). Lawrence Brown and Barney Bigard also contribute briefly after the vocal.

**IT DON'T MEAN A THING** — is more familiar territory. (SD) "We did not foresee then," Duke recalled, "that the world would take it to its own as the theme of an era." Singer Ivie Anderson was influenced by Ethel Waters and had been with the orchestras of Anson Weeks and Earl Hines before joining Duke in 1931, leaving in 1942 just seven years before her untimely death at the age of 45.

**LAZY RHAPSODY** — also known as "Swanee Rhapsody", is an obvious blueprint for Will Hudson's popular/jazz standard "Moonglow" which was co-written by Irving Mills. (SD) "The lazy swing and distinctive sound of the muted Ellington brass was to influence many other arrangers."

**BLUE TUNE** — is, despite the title, quite a jaunty mid-tempo tune featuring Artie Whetsol's 'sweet' trumpet extensively in the first chorus, while Cootie's hotter style livens up part two with assistance from Hodges and a short break from Bigard on tenor.

**BABY WHEN YOU AIN'T THERE** — sports a lovely, mournful Alabama vocal from Cootie after contributions from Hodges — (SD) ". . . this shows how masterfully Hodges — like Bigard — could complement the ensembles. He leads the saxes, too, in a passage which strikingly demonstrates the now-neglected potential of a saxophone trio." — as well as fine solos of twelve bars each from Bigard on clarinet and Nanton, punctuated by some vibe chords from Greer.

**ST. LOUIS BLUES** — opens with Cootie and his mentor Nanton growling the blues, heralding a vocal by an obscure singer who had been with Paul Whiteman. As even the obligato support of Bigard (clarinet) and Cootie fail to improve him, the tempo is picked up for a sparkling Hodges solo and an attempt at scat singing from young Harry Crosby.

**CREOLE LOVE CALL** — had been originally recorded for Victor in October 1927 with the famous wordless vocal by Adelaide Hall. Based on a solo by Johnny Dodds and intended as a 'portrait' of Bessie Smith, this extended instrumental version depicts the chasm-wide differences in 'straight' men like Whetsol and valve-trombonist Tizol against funky bluesmen like Nanton and Cootie. Stanley Dance claims that the twenty-four bars of clarinet heard before the closing bass solo, is Carney and Bigard taking twelve bars apiece.

**ROSE ROOM** — (SD) "was a band theme Duke remembered first hearing and taking a fancy to in Chicago. Exquisitely arranged, it features Bigard's low-register clarinet over muted brass, a chorus by the leader and a few bars of Hodges' alto singing above the band before Bigard returns."

**BLUE HARLEM** — like BLUE TUNE is really an optimistic mid-tempo number opened by Duke and Cootie's open horn. After an accomplished ensemble passage, Braud gets slap-happy, Nanton snarls, and Bigard soars.

**THE SHEIK OF ARABY** — (SD) "opens with a chorus by Lawrence Brown which greatly impressed musicians in 1932. Equally striking is the second chorus on which "Tricky Sam" plays a plunger-muted commentary on Hardwick's melodic statement. The third, also surprising, consists of graceful soprano variations by Hodges. In the last, Duke conceived the unusual idea of having the brass play chords like a rhythm section."

**SWAMPY RIVER** — is more of a cascading stream and is a rare (for this period) piece of self-indulgence by Duke, giving the lie to his comment that he was "just a piano-player". The band steps in towards the conclusion to give some moral support and punctuation.

**FAST AND FURIOUS** — had been recorded in February for Victor as "Lots O' Fingers" and comes from the same date as SWAMPY RIVER and boasts a variety of Ellington dexterities; fleet-fingered rhapsodizing, solid-stomping stride, and a curious double-timed percussive trick that resurfaced in his 1937 period piece "I've Got To Be A Rug-Cutter".

**BEST WISHES** — is a sentimental tune featuring a common Ellington device — the instrumental duet. Here it is between Lawrence Brown and Otto Hardwick, followed by solo efforts from Hodges and Cootie, the latter of whom brings it down in the alley.

**SLIPPERY HORN** — the first of two versions of this tune cut for Columbia/Brunswick. This differs in that only Bigard (clarinet) is heard in a solo capacity before Lawrence Brown, for whom the tune was written, explains the tune's title.

**BLUE RAMBLE** — (SD) "is a well-planned arrangement with two themes. Hodges and Williams are the major solo voices, Brown being responsible for the trombone breaks. The soloists, however, are of secondary importance in an orchestral score which demonstrates Duke's increasing skill and confidence."

#### DAVE PENNY - March 1989

#### PERSONNEL

(a) *New York City, February 2, 1932*

Arthur Whetsol, Charles "Cootie" Williams, Freddy Jenkins (*trumpets*), Joseph "Tricky Sam" Nanton, Lawrence Brown (*trombones*), Juan Tizol (*valve-trombone*), Barney Bigard (*clarinet, tenor sax*), Harry Carney (*clarinet, alto sax, baritone sax*), Johnny "Rabbit" Hodges (*soprano sax, alto sax*), Fred Guy (*banjo*), Edward "Duke" Ellington (*piano, arranger*), Wellman Braud (*bass*), William "Sonny" Greer (*drums*). (a-1): Johnny Hodges (*alto sax solo*), "Cootie" Williams (*trumpet solo*), Lawrence Brown (*trombone solo*), Barney Bigard (*clarinet solo*). (a-2): "Tricky Sam" Nanton (*trombone solo*), Johnny Hodges (*alto sax solos*). (a-3): Barney Bigard (*clarinet solo and obbligato*), Johnny Hodges (*alto sax solos*).

(b) *New York City, February 4, 1932*

Same as (a). (b-1): Whetsol (*1st trumpet solo*), Williams (*2nd trumpet solo*), Hodges (*alto sax solo*), Bigard (*clarinet where heard*). (b-2): Hodges (*alto sax solos*), Bigard (*clarinet solo*), Nanton (*trombone solo*).

(c) *New York City, February 11, 1932*

Same as (a). (c-1): Williams (*trumpet solo*), Nanton (*trombone solo*), Hodges (*alto sax solo*), Bigard (*clarinet obbligatos*). Fred Guy plays guitar. (c-2): Whetsol (*trumpet introduction and break*), Williams (*trumpet solo*), Nanton (*1st trombone solo*), Tizol (*2nd trombone solo*), Bigard (*clarinet solo*), the brief trumpet and trombone duet is by Whetsol and Tizol. Carney plays clarinet and Guy plays guitar. (c-3): Bigard (*clarinet solos*), Hodges (*alto sax solos*).

(d) *New York City, May 16, 1932*

Same as (a), except add Otto Hardwick (*alto sax, bass sax*). (d-1): Williams (*trumpet solo*), Nanton (*trombone solo*), Bigard (*clarinet solo*), Hodges (*alto sax break*). (d-2): Brown (*trombone solo*), the alto sax and trombone duet is played by Hardwick and Nanton, Hodges (*soprano sax solo*).

(e) *New York City, May 17, 1932*

Same as (d). (e-1): Williams (*trumpet break*), Brown (*trombone break*). (e-2): Hodges (*alto sax solo*), Williams (*trumpet solo*), the trombone and alto sax intro is played by Brown and Hardwick.

(f) *New York City, May 18, 1932*

Same as (d). (f-1): Bigard (*clarinet solo*), Brown (*trombone solo*). (f-2): Brown (*trombone solos*), Hodges (*alto sax solos*), Whetsol (*1st and 3rd trumpet solos*), Williams (*2nd and 4th trumpet solos*).

(Session Details: *DUKE ELLINGTON'S STORY ON RECORDS 1932-38* by Luciano Massagli, Liborio Pusateri, and Giovanni M. Volonté.)

Remastering by Jack Towers from mint 78 rpm records from the collections of George Hall, Granville Hurley, Jack Towers and Jerry Valburn. Selection by Sture Hällström.

#### Album production by Jonas Bernholm

(Special thanks to Paul Harris, Sture Hällström, Bo Scherman and Benny Åslund)



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JAZZ INFORMATION RECORDS

**DUKE ELLINGTON  
& HIS FAMOUS ORCHESTRA**  
THE BRUNSWICK SESSIONS 1932-35  
VOLUME I

MCPS

COMPACT  
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Made in Czechoslovakia

**MONO**

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2. IT DON'T MEAN A THING *Vocal by Ivie Anderson*  
3. LAZY RHAPSODY (Swanee Rhapsody) *Vocal by Cootie Williams*  
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